



What Do I Do Now?

A practical guide to help families navigate the difficult decisions and planning after the death of their Veteran.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
West Palm Beach VA Medical Center

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Local VA Contact Information

Hospice Unit: 561-422-1500
Decedent Affairs: 561-422-5436
Bereavement Services: 561-422-6846
Chaplain Service: 561-422-5661



We Are Here for You

West Palm Beach VA Medical Center is committed to assisting you during this delicate time. The death of a loved one can present a range of emotions and added stressors when making final arrangements. Our team has created this general guide to make navigating this process easier for you and your family. We are proud to serve Veterans throughout their life and assist their loved ones after their death. Thank you for trusting us with your Veteran's care. It is an honor to serve America's heroes.

Support

After the death of your Veteran, it is important to connect with your loved ones and friends for support. You may find it important for key people in the life of the deceased to communicate with each other; share their grief and stories; and especially share the good times by whatever medium they feel comfortable.

Sometimes there may be barriers to doing this in person.

These barriers may be overcome through the use of telephones, Internet, Facetime, Skype, social media and many other types of virtual communication. By using these different technologies you can see each other's faces to know that your family and friends are with you in spirit even if they cannot be with you physically.

Reminisce about the good times with them by going through old photos and videos. You may also consider journaling about your experiences with the deceased. Some people find it helpful to write a letter to the deceased to express things you were not able to when they were living. It is these emotional and spiritual touches that are most needed during the grieving process.



VA Bereavement Support

We understand that this is a difficult time and that a little extra assistance may be needed. The West Palm Beach VA Medical Center offers bereavement counseling free of cost. Please call **561-422-6846** for more information.

Community & Online Bereavement Support

(Listing does not mean endorsement by VA):

- To find groups online and face-to-face: www.griefshare.org
- Jewish Family Services Bereavement Groups: www.alpertjfs.org
- Treasure Coast Hospice Bereavement services in Martin and St. Lucie Counties: www.treasurehealth.org
- Trustbridge Hospice Bereavement services in Palm Beach County: www.trustbridgefoundation.org

Decedent Affairs

Our decedent affairs office provides support services to the families of the deceased. They may be reached at **561-422-5436**.



Life Insurance

You can call toll-free if you have any questions about your VA insurance policy. Service members or Veterans group life insurance programs: **561-419-1473**; all other VA life insurance programs: **800-669-8477**. All insurance companies require a certified copy of the death certificate.

Final Arrangements

If not previously discussed, this may be one of the most difficult decisions to make. Finding the right funeral home is important. Choose your own funeral home or cremation company. Local funeral homes offer both cremation and burial services. They will help you with all the details, such as viewing, religious service, obituary, funeral notice, flowers, music, and shipping, if desired.

Announcements

Make arrangements for obituaries and public announcements. Your funeral home, family members and other loved ones can help you through this process.

Burial Benefits

VA burial allowances are partial reimbursement of an eligible deceased's burial/cremation and funeral costs. Veterans that die from either service-related or non-service related conditions may be eligible. For details please visit www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claims-special-burial.asp or call the VA Benefits Office at **800-827-1000**.

Florida National Cemeteries

All honorably discharged Veterans are eligible to be buried in a VA National Cemetery.

The closest VA National Cemetery is located just South of West Palm Beach VA Medical Center:

South Florida National Cemetery

6501 S. State Road 7
Lake Worth, FL 33449
561-649-6489

There are several other VA National Cemeteries located in the state of Florida. Please contact the National Cemetery Administration at **1-800-535-1117**.

Social Security Administration

Your funeral director may notify Social Security of your loved one's death, but you should also contact Social Security directly at **800-772-1213**. Death benefits from Social Security are only payable to the deceased surviving spouse or dependent children. A Social Security counselor should contact you by phone or mail to initiate your claim and provide information.

Bank Accounts

At the time of this publication, the state of Florida does not freeze any joint assets. Checks made payable to deceased can be deposited into an account with the deceased's name on it.

Copies of Death Certificates

Copies of the death certificates are usually available within a week to ten days following a death. Your funeral director will advise you on how many to order and will obtain them for you. You may also obtain them from the Health Dept. of Vital Statistics, P.O. Box 210, Jacksonville, FL 32231-0042, phone **904-359-6900**, or email vitalstats@doh.state.fl.us. You will need a death certificate for cars, residences, mobile homes, stocks, bonds, private pensions, VA insurance, bank accounts, and for some credit cards. Some will only accept a certified copy.

Documentation

Families should have access to these papers and documents of the deceased:

- The deceased's service discharge papers (DD214). Go to www.archive.gov if needed.
- Family insurance policies
- A copy of the family will (not required for VA benefits)
- Marriage licenses
- Birth certificate
- Social security number
- VA documents showing the deceased's VA claim number if the Veteran ever filed for VA benefits
- Location of any safety deposit box (not required by VA)
- Bank account information



Wills, Powers of Attorney, Guardians

Power of Attorney and Guardianship cease at the time of death. If there is a will, the personal representative will be in charge of funeral arrangements. Otherwise, the next-of-kin (as state law defines) will be in charge. Contact an attorney for advice.

This information is not intended as legal advice. You are urged to seek professional legal counsel for specific concerns and/or questions.

Medication Disposal

Contact the VA Outpatient Pharmacy Service for disposal information at 561-422-6838 or call your local city's waste management department for instructions. Additional information on how to properly dispose of medications can be found at <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/ss20170322-how-to-dispose-of-medications-safely-in-the-home>

Personal Belongings

If the deceased's belongings and valuables were not already picked up from the hospital, contact Decedent Affairs at 561-422-5436.

Burial Allowances

VA burial allowances are partial reimbursement of an eligible deceased's burial/cremation and funeral costs. Veterans that die from service-related conditions as well as some Veterans that die from non-service related conditions are eligible. For details please visit the following website: www.benefits.va.gov or call the VA benefits office at 800-827-1000.

VA Issued Prosthetic Equipment

Some equipment may be returned. You may call Prosthetics at 561-422-8232.







**Veterans
Crisis Line**

1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**



LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH ONLINE
FIND US @VAWESTPALMBEACH

WEST PALM BEACH VA MEDICAL CENTER

7305 N. Military Trail • West Palm Beach, Florida 33410
www.myhealth.va.gov www.westpalmbeach.va.gov

Local VA Connect: 1-561-422-6838

Toll Free VA Connect: 1-866-383-9036

VA Tel-Care Nurse (After 4:00 p.m.): 1-877-741-3400

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